

GUIDELINES CONSERVATION DISTRICT GRANTS (HB223 GRANT PROGRAM)

Background

The 47th Legislature provided to the conservation districts one half of one percent of the coal severance tax monies. The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation distributes these funds on the basis of need to conservation districts for any purpose that they are authorized to perform pursuant to MCA, Title 76, Chapter 15, Part 4. Since 1981, conservation districts have used these funds for conservation related equipment purchases, saline seep and weed control projects, conservation education and information projects, soil survey, and various other water and soil conservation related projects.

The Resource Conservation Advisory Council (RCAC) reviews application quarterly and makes funding recommendations to the director of the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

Applications will not be denied because of race, color, religious creed, political ideas, sex, age, marital status, physical or mental handicap, natural origin or ancestry.

Guidelines

1. In order to be eligible to receive a grant or loan, a conservation district must: A) have levied the maximum county mills allowed for the current fiscal year; b) have or are in the process of developing a special project as authorized in Montana Codes Annotated, Title 76, Chapter 15; and c) have need for additional funds above the maximum statutory authority.
2. Conservation districts participating in the program must submit an annual budget to the Conservation Districts Bureau, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. Applications for administrative grants may serve this purpose.
3. Funds may be used for projects such as: **planning, education, feasibility studies, or actual construction of projects**. Conservation districts may receive funds as grants or loans as long as they advance the purpose of conservation district programs.
4. Funds may not be used to purchase food, common items that can be easily borrowed, equipment for contractors, or items not considered essential to conducting a project or meeting project goal.
5. Projects must show a public benefit as well as a conservation benefit. No monies will be given to a project, which is strictly for private benefit. All projects must be part of a conservation district plan.
6. Applications for the purchase of equipment shall be accompanied by a maintenance plan. Reasonable rental fees must be charged to cover maintenance and replacement costs.

7. Applications must include a plan to monitor the effectiveness of the project. Public information and education efforts also must be included as part of the application. All grantees must write a newspaper article in a paper of general distribution in the area of the project. The "Conservation District Grant Program" must be credited as a source of funding. Conservation districts are also encouraged to publish articles in their newsletters, if available, but this may not take the place of articles published in the newspaper. Final payment may be withheld until the article has been published.
8. Preferential consideration may be given applications that include money or in-kind services from other sources or that are for less than 100 percent of the total project costs.
9. Preferential consideration will be given to those applications of less than \$15,000. Grants over \$15,000 must have a 50:50 match from other sources on the entire project.
10. Irrigation construction or design projects must have a 50:50 cash match from the landowners or other beneficiary (such as an irrigation district or ditch company).
11. All previous grants received by applicant must be in current status (example: all reports filed) before new grant funds can be released.
12. Projects will be evaluated using the following criteria:
 - a. Promotes or results in conservation
 - b. Public benefit
 - c. Cost effectiveness
 - d. Immediate need
 - e. Fits district program/cooperator need
 - f. Matching funds or in-kind services
 - g. Applies statewide – number of people or acres affected
 - h. Outreach information dissemination plan
 - i. Duration of funding needed; and
 - j. Long-term benefits
13. Applications may be rejected if the application format is not followed is incomplete.
14. Weed spraying projects completed by private citizens are not eligible for grants.
15. The acting chair of the conservation district must sign the application form.